

Conference Paper

Interaction of the Church and Society in Commemoration Campaigns Activated By Museum of Sanctity and Asceticism in the Urals in 20th Century

Hieromonk Arkady (Sergey Y. Loginov)¹ and Oksana V. Ivanova²

¹Ekaterinburg Theological Seminary, Russia

²Museum of Sanctity and Asceticism in the Urals in 20th Century, Ekaterinburg, Russia

Abstract

The article analyzes attempts of the Orthodox Church and secular society to form some integrated space of historical memory about repressions in the Urals in the 20th century. The results of usage of contemporary forms of public activity and modern art technologies in the Museum of Sanctity and Asceticism in the Urals in XX century are highlighted.

Keywords: Orthodox Church, society, new martyrs of the 20-th century, victims of Stalin's repressions, commemoration campaign, modern arts, Ural.

Corresponding Author:

Hieromonk Arkady (Sergey Y.

Loginov)

sr.loginov@gmail.com

Oksana V. Ivanova

oxo517@gmail.com

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Loginov) and Oksana V.

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It was unexpected for many people in the USSR in 1988 when an official celebration of the thousandth anniversary of Christening of Russia took place. New period of the Russian Orthodox Church had started. Hard times of the Soviet repressions against the Church and Christians endured for more than 70 years were over. Nevertheless religious life could not just re-establish its prerevolutionary existence as there were too many changes in the 20th century; the religious tradition of prerevolutionary period had been broken off and the Church had to start from the very beginning. The Russian Constitution of 1993 declared in its Art. 14 the status of the State as a secular one. It means the millennial period of the so-called Symphony of Church and State that considered a kind of cooperation or even fusion of both has been over.

Post-Soviet Russia rejected official atheism although the Orthodox Church was not proclaimed a state religion. So the Russian Orthodox Church has entered some brand-new period of its history which by modern theologians is sometimes called the Post-Constantinian [5]. Still the inertia of a thousand-year tradition is rather strong – both

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in practice and ideological sphere. There are only few secular scientists as well as theologians that devote their researches to the comprehension of the Russian Orthodox Church existence in the new Russian State. Relationships between the Church and state still remain the subject of primary interest for most of the scientific researches and publications.

However, some researchers attempt to analyze activity of the Russian Orthodox Church in the cultural sphere of contemporary Russia [2]. Certain interest is observed among those scientists who investigate facts of the inner life of the Church – for example, the phenomenon of religious resistance in that period when the Soviet state persecuted the Church and religious believers. Life and development of culture related with the Christian values under the Soviet regime with its total supremacy of Communist atheism become nowadays subjects of academic study not only for historians but for anthropologists, philologists and specialists in cultural studies [1] also. Such researches present mostly a kind of description as the social role of the Church that overcome the repression times is not clear, and its place in the new society has not been defined. So the role of the Church in contemporary Russian society is yet to be comprehended by secular scientists and civil experts, by the state authorities and the Church itself.

It is rather difficult to study some phenomenon if it takes place in the present days and we are the eye-witnesses. Empirically one can observe conflicting tendencies. On the one hand it puts a strain on the relationship between some religious groups of the Church and the secular culture representatives. Meetings face to face happened between modern avant-garde arts and some fundamentalist groups of the Orthodox Church are often accompanied by conflicts, mutual accusations or even by legal issues. And the new and rather disputable Russia's law on offending religious feelings makes the things still worth. On the other hand dialogue of the Church and secular society may become a real challenge that turns to create new horizons for their interrelations. The repression period of the 20th century had been tragic for everyone in Russia and would demand united efforts to overcome the anthropological disaster in Russia. Nowadays it is not only the Church that has to re-identify itself in the changing world, but the society in general with its post-Communist trauma of totalitarianism has to define some new and sound background for further consolidation and development.

The Church and society have much to discuss by means of culture so that their intentions for improvements could be realized in cooperation.

Two years ago, Metropolitane of Ekaterinburg and Verkhoturie Cyril officially announced the opening of Museum of Sanctity and Asceticism in the Urals in 20th

Century. No one expected then any extraordinary reputation for the Museum – it could have been just traditional religious museum, which are usually too small to be noticed. Somehow, the Museum of Sanctity and Asceticism in the Urals in 20th Century soon has obtained some recognition of secular society of the city as well. Besides its scientific and exhibition activities, the Museum initiated several campaigns concerning commemoration efforts of the public consciousness to memorize tragic events of the previous century.

The first campaign initiated by the Museum dealt with deinstallment of billboards devoted to a positive image of I. Stalin. The main goal of the Museum is to keep memory of the Christian martyrs perished in the Stalin's concentration camps so it has become necessary to protest against public demonstration in the city the murder's portray with grateful words from citizens. As citizens, the Museum specialists could not agree to consider Stalin's name in a positive way for I. Stalin was guilty in massacre of Christians.

Our position did not imply first to turn Museum activity into a public campaign. Nevertheless posting our position at Facebook resulted in the fact that many people were involved into the discussion. Human rights defenders from Perm advised us to make a kind of declaration against Stalin's portrays in the city and address it to the municipal authorities. The declaration was written and available at Facebook, and anyone could suggest one's own corrections into the text in order to make it more understandable. It seemed to be very important to reflect the position of both Christians, believers of other confessions, and of atheists or agnostics – actually the most important task was to express the position of those whose relatives had become victims of Stalin's repressions. The declaration had to reflect the position of those who were not going to agree with terror and violence. And, this initiative of the Museum was taken by the society as absolutely positive.

Finally, many citizens and famous persons signed up this declaration. There were famous musicians and artists, scientists and concerned citizens (which were not indifferent) as well as other cities' representatives and even Russian people from abroad. The process of correspondence was reflected at Facebook – all responses of the authorities were immediately published there. Perhaps, it mattered for the municipal mass media to become interested in the situation. Soon the mass-media information made this campaign public. Various experts were involved into the discussion; the mayor of Ekaterinburg also shared his opinion on the problem. The scandalous billboards with Stalin's portrays were dismantled. For the last 2 years there have been no more scandals concerning the appearance of Stalin's images [4].

If we are to analyze this situation, a certain question may arise: why the citizens have turned to be so active in supporting Museum initiative against the Stalin's portrays on city billboards? Numerous organizations had struggled against Stalinization before the Museum was even founded. There were human rights activists and famous scientists among them; their activity was supported by mass-media. So what was the reason that the initiative of our Museum prevented people from staying indifferent to the problem of destalinization? We suggest the following reasons.

1. Society feels tired of the fruitless argues with one, and the same arguments. It has been an endless number of mutual disclosures from both sides; and the society is looking forward to something rather different, of different "color", something politically neutral, which is connected with moral standards and not with any political struggle.
2. Moreover, the horrifying facts of the Stalin's system that were often presented by historians and human rights defenders frighten us as one can see no hope in all those facts to overcome that evil. People cannot answer for sure – what made Stalin's regime to fall. Stalin was not killed, he died in due time. The system he generated continued to exist for long time before it fell down – either with no visible reason. A new community of post-soviet times has been unable to suggest some image, which could be reliable counterbalance to the powerful tyrant with the imposing ideology and the position of a tsar whose role in the World War Second was exaggerated and whose name was identified with that of a master of the Russian land. New community has not yet defined its ideals, which could reflect the attitude to human beings opposite to that of Stalin. It is so as one can see nowadays: even the publications with desalinization ideas often contain portrays of Stalin and offer no other images except negative.

In the above-described campaign, this positive image was defined by chance – the very name of the Museum pointed out the subject that could stand against Stalin with his repressive horror. The sanctity itself was opposing totalitarianism and this opposition may be taken as confrontation of Stalin and Christ. This kind of confrontation is absolutely apolitical and non-aggressive. It returns to us the understandable expectation of hope. It is true that saint people of the 20th century opposed Stalinism in a convincing way keeping image of a human-being in spite of anything. And, it is not a chance coincidence that Christ's other name is Victorious. Victorious is Christ's name for more than 2 thousand years. So, the image of sanctity and saint new-martyrs has helped us to resume a new hope, new approach to the desalinization problem.

Mutual intolerance and aggressiveness in discussions show that both opponent sides are still under a spell of spirit of disgrace and disrespect common for the post-soviet mind, that there are still tendencies to simplify our history. It should already be clear in this case any discussion would bring no results so the society demands new senses and understanding to stop spinning around in circles. Here the religious museum gain greater significance – in the Christianity, mercy and endurance do not coincide with the principles of non-resistance to evil. To the contrary the Christians must cut short any violence, terror and totalitarianism. During this campaign, our Museum has passed a long way from emotions to public solidarity and counteraction against expansions of Stalin's ideas.

It gave for both the Church and society a positive experience of successful cooperation, which resulted in a moral satisfaction when Stalin's portraits were removed from the city territory. It has turned a new experience of existential overcoming of evil and inhumanity.

Another Museum project named "The Last Portrait" was intended to attract attention to the memory of those killed and buried during the repression period of 1930-50s at the 12th kilometer of the so-called Moscow highway. The Museum specialists decided to expose last photos of the repressed people; some of the photos were made a few days before shooting. Photos of the arrested and sentenced to death were taken from the investigation files. Small-sized photos of prisoners from the Museum archive and the State Archive of Administrative Bodies of Sverdlovsk Oblast were processed with the help of digital technology. The black-and-white photos were upsized and printed on the moisture-resistant materials so that the photos could not be damaged while demonstrating on the earth – right at the place of shooting ditches. Once again, the Museum specialists decided to be beyond any confessional bounds. We addressed the State Archive specialists to provide us with the prison photos of arrested scientists and workers of culture, specialists in the field of education and military men. We also asked prison photos of common people of different age and nations. So, the review of the repressed persons' photos consisted of Christians and representatives of all the society. That is why there were different organizations that combined their efforts in commemoration – Ekaterinburg Eparchy, Human Rights Center "Memorial", State Archive of Sverdlovsk region and the Center of Photography "Mart". The Museum action was supported by such famous citizens as Eugeny Roizman, Mayor of the city, Yury Kazarin, poet, Dmitry Fogel, Chief Artist of Ekaterinburg [3].

Museum Exhibition was focusing not on the fact that many of the repressed persons were Christians but on the fact that all the people shown were our fellow citizens. And,

it is our land that has become stained with their innocent blood. The Exhibition aims at saying: if we continue living here, and our children walk on this blooded land, we are to purify it by keeping names of the perished in our memory. Here is a sample of how the city people reacted. One of the participants Eugeny Kiselev wrote: "I am in! I am also – Anatolievich (as that man)! Though we are not so much alike – his face is more European-like and I look more Ural dweller having wider cheek-bones just like my ancestors from Baikalovsky district did." As the museum exhibition was to take place outside the city (at the 12th kilometer of Moscow Highway) it became necessary to address to the public more widely.

The number of supporters was going to exceed the number of visitors – it was evident by the people's reaction in websites (we found supporters not only in Ekaterinburg, but in other cities of Russia and abroad). How to provide all our supporters with the opportunity to join the memorization process if they are not indifferent to the tragic history of the 20th century? For some time we were at a loss. Then we chose a burning red icon-lamp to become both a symbol of prayer and living memory of the repressed people and a symbol of our repentance. We suggested the supporters of this Museum project make photos of themselves with burning icon-lamps in the hand. To publish such a photo in Internet meant personal support of the Museum project of commemoration at the 12th kilometer of Moscow Highway, recognition the importance of praying action at the place where so many persons were killed during the repressions. Such a photo with a burning lamp meant also indirect participation of a person in this prayer. At the same time the red icon-lamps became a kind of penitential symbol showing our remorse for Russian atheism and anti-humanism of the 20th century. Clergymen were first who joined the Museum project, later cultural workers and politicians joined. The photos with a burning lamp were published at websites, which helped a lot to gather icon-lamps for the exhibition (as it was necessary to show as many as possible burning lamps to symbolize hope alive). Museum organized 2 places in the central part of the city where people could bring the red lamps for the Museum action. The first place for collecting lamps was in Ekaterinburg Theological Seminary (convenient for Christians) and the second place was at the Center of Modern Photography "Mart" which was more comfortable for secular public. It was clear that we needed somehow provide opportunity to join the action of memorization of the names of the repressed for everyone including those who had no chance to come to the Museum exhibition personally. So Museum announced that any person eager to join this action would become a participant if provided the Museum with an icon-lamp – no matter if it was a new one or a lamp left after some religious processions. The

Orthodox TV Channel and Broadcasting station transmitted the announcement about the icon-lamps collecting and explained the whole Museum action. Information was also available at Facebook. The accent on the responsibility for our land and its history as well as the usage of modern arts resulted in the fact that even famous atheists of the city became participants of the Museum action.

The commemorative monument at the 12th kilometer of Moscow highway is the unique place where names of the repressed enlisted in an alphabetical order. Still many citizens were not aware of this place as the state and public support for civil rights groups trying to maintain popularity of the monument were not sufficient. Actually the monument was visited twice a year by a small number of aged relatives of the repressed persons who used to participate in the official ceremony of commemoration on October 30 (Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Political Repressions), and on the Paternal Saturday on St. Trinity. Most of this aged visitors to the monument were invited in the 1990-s by the Association of Victims of Political Repressions and the number of participants of these official ceremonies of commemoration is getting less every year as they are too old already. It means the monument and the burial place are under threat of oblivion. "The Last Portrait" Museum action resonated within the society and was welcomed by teachers and human rights defenders, cultural workers and relatives of the repressed – everyone who feels anxious about the problem of keeping historical memory. First of all, it were the Christians.

The campaign of collecting icon-lamps lasted for a month and the Museum gathered much more lamps than was expected. So, the Museum project got strong public support. Still the financial problem for realization of the museum project was yet to be solved. It was suggested through the Internet sources to "adopt" a portrait of any person repressed which meant to take personal responsibility for the fact that the memory of this repressed one would be kept. Every day the Museum specialists published at Facebook one photo of the repressed person accompanied with the information about this person. Museum offered people take expenses for printing a portrait of any repressed person. The expenses for printing were rather high, nevertheless there were 20 portraits printed.

Informing people daily on the matter of Museum action by means of Internet made the action popular not only within the Sverdlovsk region – Museum got many participants from Tyumen, Yakutia, Perm and Minnesota. People transferred money for purchasing icon-lamps, for printing photos and sent names of their relatives who were also repressed.

The Museum used modern arts technology and (feeling unsure in this sphere) we addressed to the Center of Modern Photography “Mart”. The creative support of the Center became really of great help. Actually among numerous supporters of this Museum project there were intellectuals of the city – **Sergey Nikitin**, Doctor of Philosophy, Docent at the Department of Social Philosophy, Associate Professor at the Department of Social Philosophy of the Ural Federal University named after the First President of Russia B. N. Yeltsin; **Galina A. Brandt**, Doctor of Philosophy, Professor at the Department of Philosophy of the Ural State Technical University, a theatre critic and member of the Union of Theatre Workers of the Russian Federation; **Vladimir A. Kravtsov**, academician of the Russian Academy of Arts, Honoured Worker of Arts, Drama Theatre Artist; **Vadim Yu. Dulepov**, Executive Secretary of Ekaterinburg Section of the Union of Russian Writers.

A variety of people of all sorts joined the museum project. One of the participant said his grandfather was a member of the so-called “NKVD troika” at the city of Irbit. It was a milestone for the Museum project when we understood that not only the descendants of victims but descendants of executioners also were eager to participate in the repentance action conducted by the Museum of Sanctity and Asceticism in the Urals in 20th century. So, a special prayer was compiled to memorize both names of the repressed and their executioners. Christianity always prefers to shed the light on any issue and to intercede for any guilty person is responsibility of the Church. This important nuance made it possible to unite various groups of people for the problem of commemoration. It became a really unique experience of antinomy decision of the social mission – to keep in memory every name of those who had suffered from totalitarianism of the 20th century and gain strength for national reconciliation.

The experience of interaction of the Church and society has brought positive results and proved to be efficient and perspective. The projects of Museum of Sanctity and Asceticism in the Urals in 20th Century has been considered in the public sphere as a call for uniting on the basis of Christian principle of Humanity taking into account the value of any human being. This call was heard and accepted in the so-called “capital of atheism”, which is one of the unofficial names of Ekaterinburg.

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